DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 327 822 CS 010 379

AUTHOR Rasinski, Timothy V.; And Others
TITLE Home Literacy Practices of Parents Whose Children Are Enrolled in a Whole Language Kindergarten.
PUB DATE Nov 90
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the College Reading Association (34th, Nashville, TN, November 2-4, 1990).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Interviews; Kindergarten Children; Parent Child Relationship; *Parent Participation; *Parent Role; Primary Education; Reading Research; *Reading Skills; Reading Writing Relationship; *Whole Language Approach; *Writing Skills
IDENTIFIERS Emergent Literacy; *Literacy Events

ABSTRACT

A study focused on families whose children were successful but not exceptional students in kindergarten. Subjects were eight parents (all mothers) whose children had been enrolled the previous year in a kindergarten program that maintained a whole language curricular orientation. The children (four girls and four boys) were highly successful in kindergarten though none had been deemed exceptional in the progress they made in learning to read and write by the teacher, parent, or third-party observers who were part of the research team. Parents were interviewed during the two months immediately following the children's completion of kindergarten. The parents were asked a set of questions concerning their approach to literacy learning and their satisfaction with the kindergarten's holistic curriculum. Interview results indicated several home-based literacy activities including the following: reading aloud; taking dictation from child; developing interest in words, through games, etc.; writing; and providing an informal and functional literate environment. Two conclusions were drawn from the study: (1) the home literacy activities described are similar to those described in that work and tend to validate the conclusions derived from previous work; and (2) the literacy activities in the home were highly congruent with those found in the whole language kindergarten. (MG)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED327822

Home Literacy Practices of Parents whose Children are Enrolled in a Whole Language Kindergarten

Timothy V. Rasinski

Beverly Bruneau

Richard P. Ambrose

Kent State University
Kent, Ohio 44242

CS010379

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Timothy V. Rasinski

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Parents are increasingly viewed as key players in the education of their children. In a review of research on parental involvement in their children's schooling, Henderson (1988) reports that the link between parental involvement and student achievement is substantial. When parents become involved in their children's learning children's academic performance improves. Additionally, Henderson (1988) notes that the learning environment in the home plays a crucial role in learning. She concludes that "studies show that building a strong learning environment at home...powerfully affects student achievement..."(p. 150). Moreover, in a study of appropriate roles for parents in their children's education, Williams and Stallworth (1983-1984) report that parents want to play active and substantive roles in their children's educational experience.

In reading education, the role of parents and the home in providing a foundation and support for children's literacy learning has also been recognized as important (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, and Wilkinson, 1985). The creation of literate home environments is viewed as an important way for parents to nurture growth in literacy. Literate home environments include activities, artifacts, and policies that involve and promote literacy among family members.

Durkin's (1966) seminal study of children who begin school already knowing how to read pointed to several aspects of the home environment that promote literacy.

Among these were parents regularly reading to their children, providing children with reading and writing materials, and parents acting as models of literate persons for their children. More recently Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) found that inner-city children who were successfully learning to read and write had parents who were supportive of their learning. This support took the form of creating home environments that were rich in literacy. Parents provided their children with books, encouraged their children to read and write, and were purposeful users of literacy in their own lives.

The present study attempted to extend this line of inquiry by focusing on families whose children were successful but not necessarily exceptional students in kindergarten. It appeared that previous work in this area has focused on children who were exceptional in their success; either learning to read prior to beginning formal reading instruction or excelling in school under extremely difficult environmental conditions. The present investigation sought to explore families and children that fell within a more normal range of successful experiences.

Method

Subjects

The subjects for the study were eight parents (all mothers) whose children had been enrolled the previous year in a kindergarten program that maintained a whole language curricular orientation. The children of the parents (4

girls and 4 boys) were highly successful in kindergarten though none had been deemed exceptional in the progress they made in learning to read and write by the teacher, parent, or third-party observers who were part of the research team. All parents were highly supportive and pleased with their children's progress and with the curriculum that had been used in the kindergarten.

Procedures

All parents were interviewed by one of the researchers during the two months (June or July) immediately following the children's completion of kindergarten. The parents were asked a set of questions concerning their approach to literacy learning and their satisfaction with the kindergarten's holistic curriculum. In one question parents were asked to describe what they did at home, either before or during kindergarten, that contributed to their child's growth in learning to read and write. Parents were not prompted or directed to consider any specific ideas or activities. All responses were provided on the parents' own initiative. Thus, it was assumed that all responses were considered significant by the parents.

All interviews took at least thirty minutes to complete and were tape recorded for later analysis.

Analysis

All interviews were transcribed for more detailed analysis. Each interview was analyzed through categorical analysis (Spradley, 1979) in which domains or categories were established based upon parents' identification of

important home literacy activities. An individual case was developed for each parents based on the analysis. Each of the eight cases was then searched for themes relevant to the research question.

Results

Several home-based literacy activities emerged from our analysis. They will be presented here along with comments by the parents that supported our identification of the activity as significant.

Read Aloud

The one home literacy practice that was identified by all parents as a significant literacy activity was regular and substantial periods of read aloud to the children. One parent's response reflected the sentiment of the others, "I think he learned a lot from me just reading on a daily basis. We probably digest ten books a day from the library." Another parent stated, "we read to both kids, it's been a fairly regular routine before going to bed." A third parent reported spending thirty minutes every day reading to her daughter. Further, one parent reported reading to her child every night beginning at age three.

The pervasiveness and depth of parental reading to their children appears to make it a critical home literacy practice of the parents interviewed. Children were read to daily and the sessions were often quite extensive with several books read during any one session.

A number of parents reported enriching the read aloud

sessions by involving the child on the reading itself. Several mentioned discussing the stories and pictures in the book after the book was read. Two parents mentioned elaborating on the stories; often by making up stories of their own that were variations of the original stories and that sometimes included the children themselves as central characters. One mother told us, "We started making up stories...her dad would make up elaborate fantasies where Christi would appear." The same mother added that in these stories characters from familiar books read to the daughter would appear and added to the daughter's enjoyment of the story. Two parents included the child in the actual reading of the story itself, "We read every night after dinner and take turns. She'll read a book and I'll read a book." In the other family the child reread an easy book after a parent read it to her.

Dictated Texts

Four parents described taking dictation from their children. The child would dictate a story, message, sentence, or list to the parent who would transcribe it. The written text was then read by parents and children. One parent took dictation on the home computer as a way of familiarizing the child with the machine. Another mother reported that her son enjoyed dictating stories to accompany his independent drawings. She stated that later he "reads the stories to the whole family." Dictation could take a variety of forms. A third parent told us that she began taking dictation two years previously as a way to introduce

her daughter to journals. The child was encouraged to dictate the events of her day to her mother who wrote them in a journal.

Interest in Words

An interest in words demonstrated by children and nurtured by parents seemed to be another common factor in the homes of the parents we interviewed. Parents reported that many children expressed an early interest in words and the parents developed that interest through games and other activities. One parent felt that through dictation activities her son "picked up" sight words. Another reported that oral word games, such as opposites or rhyming words, and singing, especially during car trips, served to interest her daughter in reading and language. Informal activities such as car trips seemed to form the context and catalyst for such word activities. One mother reported that "When we drive along Kathy picks out words on the street. If we're in a store...she'll ask what this word is." A fourth parent reports that when her son plays by himself he likes to write word lists that are related to his current interests. She added that the activity is not so much copying words as it is thinking them up and then getting help from mom in writing them out. Still another parent reported that she labels items at home to direct her daughter's attention to the written representation for household items. Finally, a mother told us that she would write new words that Mary could read on index cards. Mary

liked to play with and count these cards and, with her mother, to make silly sentences with them.

Writing

Writing, especially writing for real purposes, seems to have been important in several homes. Letter writing was a key activity in getting children into writing. One parent reported that her daughter had "developed a greater interest in writing - she writes letters to her grandparents, likes writing to her friends in school, and if I write a note to the teacher in school she likes to write part of it." In another home a parent mentioned that her daughter makes shopping lists, writes letters to relatives, and keeps a journal. A third parent also reported that Mary "did a lot of writing, thank you notes, letters to relatives." Mary even responded in writing to items in magazines for children, contests, and one time wrote to the president.

Informal and Functional Literate Environment

Covering all these home literacy activities was an environment that could best be described as functional, informal, filled with books and other reading materials, and in which the parents acted as personal models of literate behavior.

Not once did a parent mention doing an activity that was aimed at practicing or teaching a particular isolated reading skill. All home literacy activities mentioned were grounded in real and functional purposes. Whether reading a book for the sheer pleasure of enjoying a good story or writing to communicate with a friend, all activities parents

engaged in with their children seemed to tap into an expressed need or interest of the child. One parent put personal notes in her child's lunch box on a napkin for the teacher to read to the child. "At first she couldn't read the and then all of a sudden I realized she was reading the notes," the parent reported. Later, this parent concluded, "If something is functionally based it's more successful no matter what the population and no matter what the age. If you see the applicability of something you're more likely to want to learn it."

None of the parents mentioned that they systematically planned and implemented a strategy for teaching their children to read. The activities they described seemed to be a natural part of family life and parent-child interaction. One mother emphasized that she viewed an informal approach as most appropriate for literacy learning. "Just wherever we are we pick up on what she's asking for." Another reported that her daughter's interest in reading came not from the mother but was, indeed, initiated by the child herself. Mary first became interested in reading when she would pick out signs, "We'd be driving and she'd see 'ACME' in the car and know it was the grocery store. She'd read 'Coke' on cans and when she was three or four she would read signs on TV."

The home environment itself was an important part of these children's growth in literacy. One mother complained of the "stupid" books she herself had had to read as a child

and attributed that experience to her own dislike of childhood reading. She felt now that it is important to have books that are interesting around the home and classroom. Another parent reported that "We've got books all over the place." She added that Rick has "inherited" a set of books at home and his parents add to his collection regularly by purchasing books for him.

Similarly, several parents noted the importance of modeling literate behavior for their children. Mary's mother told us, "My husband and I modeled a lot of reading so that Mary would know it's natural to just pick up a book or to write." Rick's mother also noted, "both my husband and myself read a lot...We value that and the kids see it."

Discussion

The picture that emerges from these individual descriptions of concerned parental involvement in literacy is one that resembles whole language instruction. This is not unusual in that much of whole language is based upon implementing in classrooms settings, what parents do with their children in nurturing language and literacy.

The picture of literacy in these homes is one in which literacy is not explicitly or systematically taught. Literacy is presented to children in a playful and functional manner within the context of normal family activities. Children are able to infer from the behavior of their parents and from the literate-rich environment that surrounds them that learning to read and write is something important in their family's life and something they should

want to learn themselves.

Within this informal yet literate environment parents read regularly and extensively to their children. The reading is interesting and interactive. Children are invited to comment, ask questions, and read themselves. Parents talk about stories with their children and compose their own stories for their children with storybook characters.

Writing, too, is an important aspect of these families' lives. When children are unsure of their writing abilities, parents are quick to take dictation. Later, children try out writing on their own and always for functional purposes. Writing is used to get a story down, to communicate with a friend or grandparent, to make a list of things to remember, to express one's own feelings.

An early interest in words also seems to be a dominant part of the literate home lives of these children. Children discover words and take an interest in manipulating them. Word games in the car, learning to recognize words from stories, making lists of important and interesting words, recognizing words in the environment, and writing down words on cards are some of the ways children played with words in their homes. Children seemed to realize tacitly that words are an important part of reading and writing and parents seemed to capitalize on this interest in fun and risk-free ways.

Although rather limited in its scope, this study points

to two conclusions. First, the home literacy activities described in this study are similar to those described in previous work and tends to validate the conclusions derived from previous work. Specifically, the rich literate yet informal environment of the home as the context for read aloud, purposeful writing, and sophisticated levels of parent-child interaction about stories, words, and experiences seem to form the foundation for growth in literacy learning.

The second conclusion springs from the observation that the literacy activities in the home were highly congruent with those found in the whole language-based kindergarten. Children in the kindergarten experienced little in the way confusion about reading and writing. What they did in the classroom was an extension of what they did at home. This seems to suggest that if the home activities described in this paper are indeed the type of activities that lead to successful starts and good growth in literacy at the kindergarten level then kindergarten programs that maintain a whole language orientation may act as an ideal bridge between home and school learning. Inasmuch as the literacy activities found in a whole language program reflect the types of activities found in the homes of successful literacy learners, such curricula should help to facilitate what is often a difficult transition from home to school for many children and provide continuity in what is being increasingly recognized as sound literacy instruction.

References

Anderson, R.C., Michert, E.H., Scott, J. & Willamson, I.A.G. (1985). Becoming a nation of readers: The report of the Commission on Reading. Washington, DC: National Institute of Education, U.S. Department of Education.

Durkin, D. (1966). Children who read early. New York: Columbia University, Teachers College Press.

Henderson, A.T. (1988). Parents are a school's best friends. Phi Delta Kappan, 70, 148-153.

Taylor, D. & Dorsey-Gaines, C. (1988). Growing up literate. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Williams, D. & Stallworth, J. (1983-1984). Parent involvement in education project. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.